

LITTLE SNAKE ANALYSIS
HAHNS PEAK/BEARS EARS RANGER DISTRICT
MEDICINE BOW-ROUTT NATIONAL FORESTS
Scoping Document

Introduction

The Little Snake analysis area is approximately 30,000 acres, located approximately 30 miles north of Steamboat Springs, Colorado (T11N, R85W & T11N, R84W & T10N, R84W). The analysis area is located in the southeast section of the Little Snake Geographic Area (see fig.1).

The analysis area has a developed road system with primary access provided by FDR 129, FDR 550, and FDR 500.

The analysis area includes Management Areas 4.3 Dispersed Recreation, 5.11 General Forest & Rangelands, and 5.13 Forest Products, as described in the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Routt National Forest (Forest Plan 1997 revision). Following is a summary of the general Forest Plan direction for each management area.

4.3 - Dispersed Recreation: Areas are managed to provide undeveloped recreation opportunities in landscapes which are natural or have a natural appearance. This includes the areas around Crane Park and Little Red Park.

5.11 - General forest and Rangeland - Forest Vegetation Emphasis: Areas are managed to provide a mix of forest products, forage, wildlife habitat and recreation. This includes the west side, a section in the southeast corner, and around Big Red Park.

5.13 - Forest Products: Areas are managed to produce commercial wood products. This includes the majority of the analysis area.

Most of the affected area for the proposed action lies within the 5.13 management prescription with emphasis on forest products. Standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan state desired future condition of vegetation for this management prescription. There is a low to moderate mistletoe infestation in lodgepole pine throughout the area. There is a moderate to high beetle risk in lodgepole pine and spruce/fir stands throughout the area. Any commercial timber sale will treat the vegetation in a manner to allow it to move closer to the standards and guidelines regarding forest health stated in the Forest Plan.

Purpose and Need

Based on an analysis of the existing condition of the area and Forest Plan management direction, there is a need to manage vegetation to achieve the Desired Condition. The Purpose and Need for the action is described in the following:

Purpose: Improve the health, growth and vigor of overstocked stands.

Need: Twenty six percent of the analysis area sawtimber stands are overstocked.

Forest Plan Direction: Where appropriate, reduce competition between desired trees and other vegetation (Land and Resource Management Plan, Chapter One, page 13 (1-13)). Use a full range of biologically appropriate silvicultural practices to emphasize the production of sawtimber. Timber harvest is scheduled and does contribute towards the allowable sale quantity (LRMP, 2-45). Manage stands using treatments which maintain acceptable rates of growth, as well as favor commercially valuable tree species (LRMP, 2-45).

Purpose: Replace stands severely infested with dwarf mistletoe with disease free stands, decrease levels of infestation in stands with low to moderate infestations, and decrease the spread of dwarf mistletoe.

Need: There are significant dwarf mistletoe (*Arceuthobium americanum*) infestations within the project area. Over 19% of the analysis area sawtimber stands, both lodgepole pine and mixed lodgepole pine-spruce/fir, have some level of infestation. Twenty nine percent of analysis area lodgepole pine stands have dwarf mistletoe infestations affecting 50% or more of the overstory trees. Dwarf mistletoe infestation results in a decline in tree vigor, reduced cone and seed production, and tree deformation which decreases timber marketability.

Forest Plan Direction: Plan management activities with consideration for potential insect or disease outbreaks. Design management to meet or enhance management area objectives (LRMP, 1-15). Use integrated pest management techniques, including silvicultural treatments, to meet management area objectives (LRMP, 1-15). Use preventive vegetation management practices to meet objectives and reduce the risk of insects and disease. Give priority to cover types identified as high risk (LRMP, 1-15). In project plans, consider existing infestations of insects and disease within the project area. Design activities to minimize the risk of spreading the infestation while still providing habitat for those wildlife species dependent upon the presence of insects and disease (LRMP, 1-15). Manage forested areas such that insect infestations and disease outbreaks remain locally restricted (LRMP, 2-46).

Purpose: Provide roundwood and sawtimber products for sale.

Need: Supply area sawmills and forest product industries with materials suitable for processing.

Forest Plan Direction: Cooperate with local governments and communities to develop opportunities that contribute to economic viability (LRMP, 1-2). Support development and maintenance of a sustained flow of market and nonmarket products to regional and local economies (LRMP, 1-2). Develop programs and projects that are complementary to local community objectives and plans (LRMP, 1-2). On lands suitable for timber production, manage to produce sawtimber-size trees in an economically efficient manner (LRMP, 2-45). Use a full range of biologically appropriate silvicultural practices to emphasize the production of sawtimber. Timber harvest is scheduled and does contribute towards the allowable sale quantity (LRMP, 2-45). Produce multiple wood products, including posts, poles, Christmas trees and fuelwood in an economically efficient manner through appropriate silvicultural practices (LRMP, 2-45).

Purpose: Reduce the potential for insect caused losses of merchantable sawtimber through silvicultural treatments.

Need: Seventy one percent of the spruce/fir sawtimber stands and ninety four percent of lodgepole pine sawtimber stands have moderate to high susceptibility to beetle caused losses.

Forest Plan Direction: Plan management activities with consideration for potential insect or disease outbreaks. Design management to meet or enhance management area objectives (LRMP, 1-15). Use integrated pest management techniques, including silvicultural treatments, to meet management area objectives (LRMP, 1-15). Use preventive vegetation management practices to meet objectives and reduce the risk of insects and disease. Give priority to cover types identified as high risk (LRMP, 1-15). In project plans, consider existing infestations of insects and disease within the project area. Design activities to minimize the risk of spreading the infestation while still providing habitat for those wildlife species dependent upon the presence of insects and disease (LRMP, 1-15). Manage forested areas such that insect infestations and disease outbreaks remain locally restricted (LRMP, 2-46).

Proposed Action

The Hahns Peak/Bears Ears Ranger District of the Medicine Bow/Routt National Forests proposes to harvest approximately 2120 acres of mature and overmature sawtimber sized forested stands in the Little Snake area. The proposal includes the following activities:

Clear-cutting approximately 310 acres in lodgepole pine cover types, selectively harvesting approximately 1770 acres of spruce/fir and lodgepole pine cover types, and removing overstory on approximately 40 acres is proposed. Natural regeneration is planned for all clear cut acres. Approximately 8 miles of new road construction may be required. Timber harvest will yield approximately 6 mmbf of sawtimber with lodgepole pine making up about 75% of this volume.

Post sale work would include, but is not limited to:

- Regeneration and stocking surveys to assure proper reforestation of harvested stands.

- Thinning of undesirable and damaged trees to allow the residual stand to be released for increased growth rates.

- Closure of existing roads no longer needed for access.

In addition to harvest activities there is approximately 250 acres of potential precommercial thinning or release and weed treatments within the analysis area.

Sixteen watershed improvement projects are also included in the proposed action.

As part of the Little Snake Analysis, a detailed Roads Analysis will be completed. This will be an integrated ecological, social, and economic approach to transportation planning, addressing both existing and future roads, and transportation needs.

All proposed activities would take place within the Little Snake analysis area, and are planned for implementation beginning in 2003.

Scope of the Analysis

This environmental analysis will analyze the environmental consequences of the proposed action and reasonable implementable alternatives to that action while meeting the purpose and need.

Potential Issues

Evaluate road densities
Impact on recreation trails along FDR 520
Amount and location of cover for wildlife
Goshawk nests and other species habitat
Lack of Old Growth from fire history and past management
Opportunities for prescribed fire and fuels reduction
Hazards and risks for fire
Mountain pine beetle and spruce bark beetle infestation risks
Channel stability in Silver City Creek
Amount and location of stream crossings
Opportunities for road closures
Look for ATV opportunities and conflicts
Dwarf Mistletoe control
Post and Pole sale opportunities
Impacts on visuals
Winter hauling opportunities
Erosion mitigations in proper locations
Reduce hazards to snowmobilers
Seedling damage by snowmobiles
Effects to sale economics with accumulating restrictions
Livestock impacts on regenerating stands
Heritage concerns with Ellis trail
Impacts to dispersed camping sites in the Little Red Park area
Effects of past harvest and road construction on watershed
West side of analysis area soils may be a problem (erosive, unstable?)
Consider excluding or restricting areas of noxious weeds within proposed units
Evaluate silvicultural ramifications of clearcutting/thinning in light of Lynx listing